

- Newsroom
- News Releases
- Press Coverage
- News Photos
- Public Employee Press

Public Employee Press

Book review



- PEP May 2016
Table of Contents
- Archives

Shining a light on dark money

By MOLLY CHARBONEAU

- La Voz
Latinoamericana
- Radio Show
- TV Show

In her latest book *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*, author Jane Mayer shines a light into the shadowy corners where the wealthiest of the super-rich - the .01 percent of the 1 percent - meet in secret to plan new ways of profiteering at the expense of ordinary working people.

Providing a who's who of the super rich, Mayer exposes how far removed these billionaires are from the ideals of democracy, fairness, equality and a decent quality of life that most people hold dear - and how they seek to manipulate the rules for their own financial gain.

Dark Money opens with a 2009 meeting of powerful business interests near Palm Springs just days after President Barack Obama's first inauguration.

The convener: Charles Koch who, with his brother David, runs Koch Industries, Inc., the second largest private company in the United States. The plan: amass a mega-fund from wealthy donors to clandestinely bypass voter sentiment and ruthlessly influence the political process for greater profit. Not a new tactic, but taken to a new level.

"Cumulatively, the many-tentacled ideological machine they built became known as the Kochtopus," says Mayer.

"The sheer dimension of it is what sets them apart," according to Charles Lewis, founder of the Center for Public Integrity, who is quoted in the book. "They have a pattern of lawbreaking, political manipulation, and obfuscation. I've been in Washington since Watergate, and I've never seen anything like this. They are the Standard Oil of our times."

Why is this important to DC 37 members and other public and private workers? Because the Koch network's agenda is to cut working peoples' wages; eliminate safety, health and environmental protections; starve communities by avoiding corporate taxes; undercut voting rights, and deny workers the right to defend themselves by joining a union.

Mayer describes how Wisconsin AFSCME members, along with teachers and other public workers felt the network's slimy tentacles after Scott Walker was elected governor. Funded by wealthy arch-conservatives, particularly the Koch Industries PAC, Walker announced he would essentially tear up workers' union contracts.

Despite a valiant campaign by Wisconsin public workers and activist supporters, including an awe-inspiring occupation of the state capitol and a petition campaign to recall the governor, Mayer contends that dark money helped Gov. Walker stay in office. He returned the favor by stripping state public employees of their right to bargain for fair wages and benefits.

Dark Money is a valuable know-your-enemies exposé of the big-money network that the Koch brothers and other billionaires have lined up to push their agenda. Yet it is also a reminder of the type of popular pushback that, when strong enough, can defeat their best laid plans - as happened with their failed attempt to run Scott Walker for president.